*Statement of Research Plan for the Next Five Years:*

*Toward an Integrative Shared Cultural Memory* *in the Mediterranean*

For the last century, our Mediterranean region has been facing a very harsh cycle of hatred and violence, particularly in Israel/Palestine. I would argue that there are two main reasons for this harsh and brutal violence prevalent in our region. The first, and the best known, is the nature of the ethnocentric model of the modern nation-state. The second, and the less known, is the ethno-religious memory dominant among the groups in-conflict. One of the best ways to get out of the cycle of hostility and violence in which we live today in Palestine/Israel lies in transforming the ethno and religio-historical memories in-conflict and eschatological beliefs in-contention into one integrative cultural memory, i.e. a shared memory of Mediterranean culture – *kulturelle Gedächtnis* – a concept coined by Aby Warburg, developed by Jan Assmann, and recently adapted by Guy Stroumsa. The dialectics of the Mediterranean religious and cultural interchange creates what Stroumsa has called “the Abrahamic eco-system,” only within it can one fully understand the history of religions and of religious, cultural, and historical concepts. Too often, this history and these concepts have been – and still are – the core of bigotry, prejudice, and violence.

Such cultural memory provides one of the best ways out of the cycle of bigotry and violence, and altering the contemporary reciprocal impoverishment into reciprocal enrichment. Such a cycle is nourished by the separation between all groups and religions in-conflict and the ignorance among them regarding the culture – religious as well as secular – of the other groups and religions. To borrow a wise quotation from Galen, “ignorance is the vice faculty of the unwell souls, where the illumination is the merit faculty of the excellent souls.”

I would argue that such a passage from *religious* to *cultural memory* can contribute towards creating a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, the counter narrative to that which breeds religious violence and bigotry. While the first is centered and well-founded upon the experience of one ethnic group, religion, or “nation,” the second strives to integrate the ethno-religious memories of other groups, religions, and “nations” within a given society. Judeo-Arabic literature, which was originally written in Arabic, could be the very best corpus to contribute towards such a transformation if we could succeed in transliterating a significant amount of this rich Jewish literature into Arabic editions, with an Arabic alphabet, and publishing it for Arabic audiences.

Generally, I would argue that the modern Judaism that has developed within the framework of the Zionist project, which is inflicted in nation-state vocabulary, is strictly Ashkenazi Judaism. This cultural slant excluded the largest portion of the rich Jewish literature – intellectual as well as exegetic – that developed over hundreds of years in the Mediterranean region, at least until the expulsion from Spain. A small portion of this literature, such as Maimonides' writings, could not be ignored, and it was expressed in, and translated into, ethnic and particularistic terms, and was subject to salient manipulation (see mainly Menachem Kellner’s publications).

Therefore, my research projects for the next few years will strive to explore different manifestations of the symbiotic nature within medieval Mediterranean culture. By symbiotic nature, I mean the movement of ideas and systems between cultures and religions and the re-shaping of these ideas to allow their absorption within a given culture. The symbiotic nature flows from two key sources: (1) the presence of different cultures in the same place – in this case the Mediterranean – and the interactions between them over time; and (2) the conversions from one religion to another and shifts from one language to another, with special emphasis on Syriac traditions. In other words, people in the same place and cultural environment shifted naturally from one language and religion to another. This same act of shifting ideas and systems does not ensure the preservation of the same ideas and the same systems that were held before, since each imported an idea in need of re-shaping to ensure its absorption into the "host culture" while ensuring some degree of ethnic retention: every time such a concept crossed a border it fused with other elements within the new culture and took on a new form.

My research project is composed of four major components:

1- One of my research projects seeks to prepare a revised edition of Saadia Gaon's*Commentary on Genesis* (based on the various Genizah manuscripts), available in both Judeo-Arabic-Hebrew and Arabic-English editions.

While the contributions of Saadia Gaon to Jewish thought are widely recognized, the content and scope of his extraordinary philosophical, intellectual, and cultural abilities has yet to be fully understood. Saadia was a great master of the Jewish tradition side-by-side with his openness to the cultural and intellectual environments of his time; he was a very influential and revolutionary intellectual and commentator. As Rina Drory has put it, he was able to smuggle innovations within the "closed rabbinic system." Theologian, philosopher, and rabbi, Saadia's legacy includes a number of philosophical and theological treatises, Judeo-Arabic translations of the Bible, and extensive exegetical works, including his Judeo-Arabic commentary on Genesis, various rabbinical, methodological, lexicographical, and grammatical writings, liturgical poems, and books.

In his exegetical works, Saadia tried to demonstrate his wide-ranging intellectual knowledge and depth. His commentary on Genesis had been virtually unknown for many generations. Therefore, many rich ideas and traditions – both Jewish and non-Jewish – are still waiting for further and deeper examination. After gathering manuscripts and collecting fragments from various Genizah collections, the late Moshe Zucker brought to light an immense corpus of this commentary containing the original Judeo-Arabic and a Hebrew translation (published by The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1984).

It is widely known, however, that Zucker's edition is very awkward, both for the numerous mistakes in transliteration of the original Judeo-Arabic texts and for adapting a very liberal and free translation. In addition, since 1984, many new fragments and manuscripts have been revealed, identified, and released, especially from the two Firkovich collections in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg. Three years ago (in August 2015), a professional committee at the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem approved my suggestion to prepare a second and revised edition based on various Genizah manuscripts and on other sources such as quotations from Saadia's exegetical works that appeared in medieval Jewish commentaries.

This research project attempts to re-introduce one of the richest Jewish exegetical works to the general Jewish and Arabic world. Furthermore, the study will prove useful to the academic community and the pursuit of future research on related topics. Finally, during these times of mistrust and sometimes enmity, the study will reveal the strong ties among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions, especially when published in the three languages most relevant to these traditions: Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

The main expected benefits of this research would be to provide a rich Jewish source for the use of different researchers striving to reveal the intellectual and cultural environment of the medieval period and to make its relevance felt in our time.

The final product will be published in two different editions. One includes the original Judeo-Arabic and a Hebrew translation, and will be published by the Ben-Zvi Institute in the coming two years, while the other will be published by Brill publishing house in Leiden. To date, I have collected, transliterated, and edited the original Judeo-Arabic manuscripts (nearly 100 manuscripts). I have also identified many quotations from Saadia’s commentaries in other medieval Jewish commentaries, which can help to fill the lacunas. In the coming two years, I plan to carry out the Judeo-Arabic-Hebrew translation and add extensive and explanatory footnotes, while in the later three years, I plan to prepare the Arabic-English edition.

2- In another research project, titled *Human Being as a Microcosm: the Judeo-Arabic Prism*, I will try to elucidate the different meanings of this classical Greek idea of exploring the nature and the status of the human being in the created world as it was incorporated and reflected in the corpus of Judeo-Arabic literature. . The pre-Socratic philosophers and later on the Platonic tradition used this concept in the sense of human being as a "frontier being," living on the edge between matter and spirit, with tension caused by the diverse pulls of these two dimensions. But, from the third century BC onwards, it developed new and different meanings, mainly in Stoicism and later in the commentaries of the Church Fathers. It seems that the Stoics further developed and re-shaped this idea to mean that the human being is the goal of the created world. The same concept was consequently used in Greek and Syriac Christian literature in new ways. For instance: the human being as the master of the corporeal creation and the human being as the cosmos in miniature – mirroring the unity of the cosmos itself – but not as the ultimate goal of the created world. This same concept is incorporated in Islamic literature and received mainly the Stoic meaning, which emphasized its eminent layers. In addition, this concept was also incorporated in the Judeo-Arabic literature, Rabbinic as well as Karaite, but with vast and different meanings. The proposed article aspires to expound these meanings as a case study to emphasize the Christian-Jewish links through the middle ages (9th-15th centuries) as well as to prove the different theological purposes and characters of using this concept.

3- A third study, *Interpreting the Biblical El-Shaddai in Judeo-Arabic Literature: Three Different Traditions*, will try to explore different exegetical traditions of this divine appellation, mainly those of Syriac and Greek Byzantine traditions, as incorporated into Judeo-Arabic literature. I will demonstrate that this exegetical tradition was re-shaped in order to fit, in different ways, a single, confused exegetical sentence mentioned in *Bereshit Rabbah.*

4- Inspired by the above-stated second line of inquiry concerning religious conversions and language shifts, I am also aiming to produce annotated Arabic editions of the corpus of great medieval Judeo-Arabic works of Jewish thought, with an emphasis on Jewish traditional sources as well as Syriac traditions and relevant Islamic materials. This ambitious project aims to render these masterpieces of Jewish thought accessible to the contemporary Arabic-speaking world, which knows little if anything about Judaism. The project further aims to serve academic scholars of Arabic and Islamic literature who do not read Hebrew and/or are not sufficiently well versed in Judeo-Arabic literature.

I intend to publish a series of annotated Arabic editions of great medieval Judeo-Arabic works of Jewish thought. The series aims to fill a critical gap by opening Jewish intellectual culture to the Arab world. In terms of acculturation and socio-political cultivation, I am very conscious of the socio-cultural and "ideological" implications of my academic vocation, projects, and approaches. A scan of the books of Jewish philosophy available in Arabic today would yield very few titles, including: an Arabic edition of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* (Hüseyin Atay's edition, 1973); Saadia Gaon's *Doctrines and Beliefs* (S. Landauer's edition, 1880); and Bahya ibn Paqudah's *Guide to the Duties of the Heart* (A.S. Yahuda's edition, 1912). These editions, however, are not annotated and are almost unreadable, and their target audience is limited to a few academic researchers of Judeo-Arabic culture. While there has been much written about Judaism and Jews in Arab Islamic and Christian culture, there is little access to original Jewish sources in the Arab world. One of my own foremost purposes in publishing transliterated and annotated editions of Judeo-Arabic books and monographs is to help addressing this address this critical gap. It should be noted that most researchers of Arab and Islamic cultures, including European scholars of Islamic and Arab culture, do not read Hebrew script. Therefore, my editions will serve their research purposes as well.

Most of Saadia Gaon's books and exegetical works exist solely in fragments and lack critical editions. My first two projects in this component of my research are to produce a critical Arabic edition of Saadia's *Doctrines and Beliefs* and a critical edition and analytical study of his *Introductions*. The "introduction" is a medieval literary genre in which the author elucidates his aims, methods, and the importance of his book, and in many cases it can be considered an independent work. Such a genre flourished in Judeo-Arabic literature, especially in the writings of Saadia Gaon and Maimonides. Each of his *Introductions* provides the clearest explication of his basic principles and methods of analysis and interpretation, as well as the challenges that he faced in his translation and exegetical work. One cannot understand Saadia's intellectual worldview fully without understanding the outlines and his elucidations mentioned in his *Introductions*.

In sum, the various components of my research project for the next five years aim to broaden access to the great works of the Judeo-Arabic tradition, both by broadening the literary traditions that shaped medieval Jewish thought to include the Christian and Islamic exegetical and intellectual traditions, and by making critical and annotated Arabic editions of some of these great works available in contemporary Arabic, as a tool of improving an integrative shared cultural memory in the Mediterranean.